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An Angry Shultz Says He Can 'See No Excuse'

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 1 — "We can see no excuse for this appalling act," Secretary of State George P. Shultz, his voice occasionally rising in anger, said at a news conference this morning in which he officially announced that Western intelligence had confirmed that a Soviet fighter had shot down a Korean Air Lines 747 jumbo jet.

The airliner had apparently strayed in and out of Soviet airspace for two and a half hours, Mr. Shultz said. At least 30 American citizens, including a prominent conservative Congressman, were among the 269 people on the plane.

Late this afternoon, the State Department said the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrei A. Gromyko, had sent a message to Mr. Shultz that was along the lines of an earlier statement by the Soviet press agency Tass. The Tass statement reported that a plane had violated Soviet airspace but seemed to disclaim responsibility for the downing of the craft.

'Signs of a Possible Crash'

Mr. Gromyko added, in response to the American request for information, that Soviet search planes had found "signs of a possible crash" near Moneron Island, off the southwest coast of Sakhalin Island.

John Hughes, the State Department spokesman, said the United States had told the Soviet Embassy that it "finds this reply totally inadequate and reiterates its demand for a satisfactory explanation."

Despite the incident, Mr. Shultz indicated that he plans to go ahead with a scheduled meeting with Mr. Gromyko next week in Madrid. Both will be there for a meeting of East-West foreign ministers.

"I certainly will want to meet with Foreign Minister Gromyko and hear what he has to say about this," Mr. Shultz said.

'Another Nail — No, a Spike'

Even those members of Congress who have criticized the Administration for not doing enough to foster better relations with Moscow condemned the Soviet action. Senator Patrick J. Leahy, Democrat of Vermont, an arms-control advocate, said that "it's another nail — no, a spike — in the coffin" of arms control. Others predicted a stiffer anti-Soviet posture in Congress.

Richard Burt, Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, said options were being studied on possible American responses. He stressed, however, that although there were Americans aboard the airliner, it was not primarily a Soviet-American issue but an "international one." There were suggestions that the United Nations Security Council might be asked to condemn the Soviet Union.

It also seemed likely that unless there is a full apology and explanation from Moscow, there will be another pause in efforts by Washington to improve relations in such projects as a new cultural-exchange agreement and the setting up of consulates in New York and Kiev. These exchanges were canceled once by Washington after the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979.

But it also seemed likely that the United States would go ahead with arms-control negotiations with the Soviet Union. Talks are to resume in Geneva next week on limiting medium-range missiles; any halt in those talks would likely provoke concern among Europeans, who are urging Washington to seek an agreement to preclude the need to deploy new American missiles in Europe this year.

First Grain Sales Announced

But even as the Administration was considering steps to take, the Agriculture Department announced the first sale to the Soviet Union under a new long-term grain deal signed last week in Moscow.

It said that the Russians had bought 500,000 tons of wheat and 400,000 tons of corn valued at about \$150 million. President Reagan has previously opposed grain embargoes to the Soviet Union as unnecessarily penalizing farmers.

There were indications, however, that American conservative groups will seek to use the downing of the plane as a justification for halting all moves to improve ties.

'Most Vocal Anti-Communist'

In part, this was because Representative Larry P. McDonald, Democrat of Georgia, who is chairman of the John Birch Society, was on the Korean airliner.

Richard A. Viguerie, publisher of Conservative Digest, said today that Mr. McDonald "is considered the most vocal anti-Communist in the House of Representatives."

Mr. Viguerie said the United States "should respond to this act in the strongest possible nonmilitary terms." He suggested a suspension in arms-control negotiations, the expulsion of Soviet personnel, the recall of the American Ambassador from Moscow, the suspension in all American trade with the Soviet Union, including grain and pipeline equipment, and the consideration of severing diplomatic ties.

The stiff statements issued by the Administration were in part an effort to head off expected calls for tough actions by conservatives, a State Department official said. But he added that "Shultz didn't use the word revulsion lightly — we really feel it."

The American anger was heightened, officials said, by the fact United States intelligence believes the Korean airliner was on its way out of Soviet airspace. The airliner was believed to have been downed while still in Soviet airspace, between Sakhalin Island and Moneron Island, which is 30 miles southwest of Sakhalin.

One American official said the Soviet planes tried to get the Korean airliner to land and decided to shoot it down when that failed. The American information is based on radio intercepts and radar trackings by American and Japanese installations, officials said.

Mr. Shultz and Mr. Burt gave unusually detailed descriptions of the events of the last 24 hours.

According to Mr. Shultz, the Korean aircraft, en route from New York to Seoul, left Anchorage at 1400 hours Greenwich mean time (10 A.M., Eastern daylight time) on Wednesday. Approximately two hours later, he said, "the aircraft came to the attention of Soviet radar."

'Strayed Into Soviet Airspace'

He said the airliner "strayed into Soviet airspace over the Kamchatka Peninsula and over the Sea of Okhotsk and over the Sakhalin islands," some of the time over Soviet airspace and some of the time out of it.

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"The Soviets tracked the commercial liner for some two and a half hours," he said.

At 1812 G.M.T. (2:12 P.M., E.D.T.), he said, "a Soviet pilot reported visual contact with the aircraft."

"The Soviet plane was, we know, in constant contact with its ground control," he said. Nine minutes later, Mr. Shultz said, the Korean plane was reported at 10,000 meters, and at 1826 G.M.T. (2:26 p.m., E.D.T.), "the Soviet pilot reported that he fired a missile and the target was destroyed."

"At 1830 hours the Korean aircraft was reported by radar at 5,000 meters," he continued. "At 1838 hours the Korean plane disappeared from the radar screen."

"We know that at least eight Soviet fighters reacted at one time or another to the airliner," he said. "The pilot who shot the aircraft down reported after the attack that he had in fact fired a missile, that he had destroyed the target and that he was breaking away."

Says Kerosene Was Sighted

An hour later, Mr. Shultz said, Soviet search planes conducted a mission in the vicinity of the last sighting of the plane. He said one of them reported "finding kerosene on the surface of the seas in that area."

Mr. Burt said the United States did not have intelligence information at the

time the incident was occurring, on Wednesday afternoon Washington time. He said the State Department was alerted on Wednesday night between 10 P.M. and 10:30 P.M. that the plane was off course and no longer on radar. He said there was a suggestion, which Korean Air Lines made public, that the plane had been forced down by Soviet planes and had landed in Sakhalin.

But he said that within the hour there were "other indications that much more tragic circumstances had taken place" because American intelligence could not confirm that the plane had landed in Sakhalin.

Soviet Official Is Called

Mr. Burt said he telephoned and woke up the Soviet chargé d'affaires, Oleg M. Sokolov, and asked for information. Mr. Sokolov, he said, knew nothing about it.

By the "wee hours" today, Mr. Burt said, American intelligence agreed that the plane had been shot down. This was done, other officials said, by carefully going over the tapes of the monitored intercepts and radar sightings.

Mr. Sokolov was called to the State Department this morning to meet with Lawrence S. Eagleburger, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, where the American request for information was repeated.